

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-08

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S/S:-S;MEDENHAM
S/S; MR. SEBASTIAN(S/S 7707504)
-----211910Z 026341 /46
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PPDC, LI

SUBJECT: MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT CARTER TO PRESIDENT
TOLBERT

1. PLEASE PASS THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT
CARTER TO PRESIDENT TOLBERT. SIGNED ORIGINAL DATED MARCH
16, 1977, WILL FOLLOW.

QUOTE. DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR MESSAGE OF FEBRUARY 24 IN WHICH YOU
EXPRESS YOUR CONCERN OVER THE SERIES OF RECENT INCIDENTS
INVOLVING LIBERIAN FLAG VESSELS IN OR NEAR U.S. TERRITORIAL
WATERS. I ASSURE YOU THAT WE ARE VERY MUCH AWARE OF THE
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EFFORTS YOU ARE MAKING TO KEEP SUCH INCIDENTS FROM
RECURRING.

WE HAVE NOTED THE CONVENING OF A BOARD OF INQUIRY ON THE
ARGO MERCHANT INCIDENT, AND WE SHARE YOUR HOPE THAT ITS
FINDINGS WILL HELP TO REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD OF FUTURE
OCCURRENCES. WE FEEL THAT THIS AND OTHER SUCH ACTIONS

TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA ARE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TO THE WELFARE OF THE ENTIRE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

I APPRECIATE, MR. PRESIDENT, YOUR PERSONAL INTERVENTION IN THIS MATTER. SINCERELY, JIMMY CARTER. UNQUOTE.

2. PRESIDENT CARTER'S MESSAGE IS IN RESPONSE TO THE FOLLOWING FROM PRESIDENT TOLBERT.

QUOTE. MY GREAT AND GOOD FRIEND:

THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF LIBERIA AND I ARE EXTREMELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE ACCIDENTS WHICH OCCURRED IN OR NEAR UNITED STATES TERRITORIAL WATERS OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS INVOLVING SHIPS REGISTERED UNDER THE LIBERIAN FLAG. I WISH TO EXPRESS MY PERSONAL REGRETS, AND THOSE OF THE LIBERIAN PEOPLE, THROUGH YOU, MR. PRESIDENT, TO THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. OUR SENTIMENTS ARE ROOTED NOT ONLY IN OUR CONCERN, RESPECT, AND SINCERE FRIENDSHIP FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, NOR ONLY IN THE FACT THAT VESSELS FLYING OUR FLAG HAVE BEEN INVOLVED, BUT EQUALLY IN OUR RECOGNITION THAT THIS EARTH, WHICH WE ALL SHARE, IS OUR COMMON HERITAGE AND THE ESSENTIAL SOURCE AND SUPPORT OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT. POLLUTION ANYWHERE, WHETHER OF THE AIR, SEA OR LAND, THREATENS THE FRAGILE BALANCE OF NATURE AND ULTIMATELY ENDANGERS THE LIFE OF THE ENTIRE PLANET.

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LET ME ASSURE YOU THAT WE ARE FULLY AWARE OF THE DANGERS WHICH DO EXIST, AND APPRECIATE THE FACT THAT MAJOR INITIATIVES FOR PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AROUND US, AND MORE SPECIFICALLY, THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT, WILL REQUIRE AN INCREASED MEASURE OF INTERNATIONAL ACTION AND COORDINATED SUPPORT BY ALL NATIONS. THIS AWARENESS HAS ALREADY BEEN MANIFESTED IN OUR ACCEPTANCE OF ALMOST ALL OF THE MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS CONCERNING POLLUTION AND SAFETY OF LIFE AT SEA, AND WILL BE FURTHER REVEALED BY ACTIONS WE INTEND TO UNDERTAKE IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

IN THIS RESPECT, WE DO NOT CONSIDER IT USEFUL OR KIND THAT OUR FLEET HAS BEEN CLASSIFIED AS ONE OF "FLAG OF CONVENIENCE." UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE BEEN SUBJECTIVELY CRITICIZED WITHOUT REGARD TO OUR CONSCIENTIOUS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE SAFETY ON BOARD VESSELS FLYING OUR FLAG, OUR SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED SAFETY RECORD OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS, OR OUR UNIQUE AND WORLDWIDE INSPECTION NETWORK.

NEVERTHELESS, WE DO RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE IMPROVED MEASURES WHICH ARE NECESSARY TO BE UNDERTAKEN, BOTH IN OUR OWN RIGHT AND IN CONCERT WITH OTHER NATIONS TO REDUCE THE RISK OF CASUALTIES SUCH AS THE RECENT "ARGO MERCHANT" DISASTER; AND THESE MEASURES WE WILL UNDERTAKE. IN THE

MEANTIME, IT DOES NOT SEEM TO US TIMELY FOR US TO BE DEFENSIVE ABOUT OUR RECORD, WHICH, NOTWITHSTANDING, WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE HAS BEEN GOOD, RELATIVE TO THAT OF OTHER MAJOR MARITIME NATIONS, BUT RATHER A TIME TO SEARCH FOR MEANS BY WHICH THE DANGER OF EVER INCREASING POLLUTION OF THE OCEANS AND WATERWAYS MAY BE REDUCED OR ELIMINATED. WE WILL NOT COMPROMISE, WHATEVER THE COST, ON OUR COMMITMENT TO IMPROVED STANDARDS IN THIS AREA.

I HAVE THEREFORE THOUGHT IT APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME, ON THE EVE OF THE CONVENING IN NEW YORK BY OUR GOVERNMENT OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A MARITIME BOARD OF INQUIRY INTO THE ARGO MERCHANT ACCIDENT, TO EXPRESS TO YOU AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, OUR GENUINE, AND CONSIDERATE DISTRESS AT THESE RECENT MARINE DISASTERS. THE BOARD OF INQUIRY, WHICH IS MADE UP OF PROMINENT CITIZENS OF OUR TWO COUNTRIES, WILL CONDUCT ITS OWN HEARINGS AND INVESTIGATIONS, WHICH WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, AS WILL THE CONCLUSIONS THAT IT REACHES. OUR GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO FORMALLY INVITED THE UNITED STATE COAST GUARD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INVESTIGATION.

WE HOPE THAT THE FINDINGS OF THE BOARD OF INQUIRY WILL NOT ONLY EXPLAIN THE CAUSE OF THE CASUALTY, BUT WILL ALSO BE OF GREAT VALUE TO ALL MARITIME NATIONS IN SEEKING IMPROVED MEANS OF PREVENTING THE RECURRENCE OF SUCH TRAGEDIES. FOR OUR PART, WE WILL DEFINITELY TAKE POSITIVE AND APPROPRIATE MEASURES WITHIN INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATIONS WITH A VIEW TO IMPROVING SAFETY STANDARDS AND RULES GOVERNING THE CARRIAGE OF CARGOES WHICH COULD BE HIGHLY POLLUTING IF RELEASED INTO THE SEAS AND WATERS. IT IS MY FERVENT WISH THAT OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS MAY WORK COOPERATIVELY TOGETHER TOWARDS THIS END.

PLEASE ACCEPT, MR. PRESIDENT, THE ASSURANCES OF MY HIGHEST CONSIDERATION AND ESTEEM, SINCERELY YOURS,
WILLIAM R. TOLBERT, JR. UNQUOTE.

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